

# The Unrelenting Search for Etan Patz

By SELWYN RAAB

Every day Detective William Butler retraces the route that 6-year-old Etan Patz should have taken on that Friday morning two months ago when he disappeared.

Starting at 7:30 A.M., Detective Butler, a husky man who stands 6 feet, 2 inches tall, walks slowly back and forth for two hours on Prince Street: past a health-food store, a restaurant, several art galleries and a bakery. He is searching desperately for a witness or a clue that might have been overlooked by the police in their investigation of the boy's disappearance on May 25 in the SoHo section of lower Manhattan.

"Yes, it's a long shot," Detective Butler said, "but by now I feel like he's my own son, and you can't give up."

The possible kidnapping of Etan, a blond-haired boy who is 3 foot, 4 inches tall and weighs 50 pounds, has led to the most extensive and longest search for a missing child in New York in decades, according to the Missing Persons Squad.

Etan, a pupil in the first grade, was last seen walking from his home at 113 Prince Street, near Greene Street, to a school-bus stop less than two blocks away at West Broadway. It was the first time his parents had let him go to the bus unescorted.

Detective Butler, who has six children of his own, was assigned to the investigation the first day the boy was reported missing. He has interviewed more than 200 people, talked with psychics who maintain that they have had visions of the youngster, wandered through scores of vacant buildings and climbed a water tower in response to a report that a young boy was seen on a roof.

## Hundreds of Tips Received

"There could be someone out there we missed, someone who just came back to the city," he said, in explaining his daily talks with pedestrians on Prince Street. "Or someone who saw something and didn't think it was important but that can fit it in with something we now know."

One person the 49-year-old detective hopes to find is a man who was seen walking two dogs on Prince Street about 8 A.M., the same time Etan vanished. "The dog-walker might have seen nothing, but we'd still like to find him," said the detective, who has been on the force for 24 years.

In the first two weeks of the inquiry, when there were hundreds of reports or tips every day to the police about the boy's possible whereabouts, more than 500 detectives and other officers were assigned full-time or part-time to the case. The volume of tips has dropped to six or seven a day, and now a team of four de-

## STILL MISSING



Missing Since Friday May 25th, 1979. Last seen 8 a.m. at Prince St. & West Broadway.

DATE OF BIRTH: November 5, 1972. Race: White. Height: 3'4". Weight: 50 lbs. Build: Slim. Eyes: Blue. Hair: Blond. Last seen wearing a light blue short-sleeved shirt, blue shorts, and white sneakers. Last seen with a backpack. Last seen with a backpack. Last seen with a backpack.

Police Headquarters are requested to call (212) 374-6015

POLICE  
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LOST  
CHILD  
ETAN  
PATZ



etectives works full-time on the investigation.

Longtime detectives in the Missing Persons Squad say they cannot recall a similar case where a child as young as Etan has been missing for so long. There have been no ransom calls to the boy's parents, who have been instrumental in distributing 300,000 "Lost Boy" posters of their son with his photograph and a description.

Julie Patz, who has two other children — a daughter, Shira, who is 9 years old, and a son, Ari, 2 — said Detective Butler had "become like a second father" to her and her husband, Stanley, a photographer.

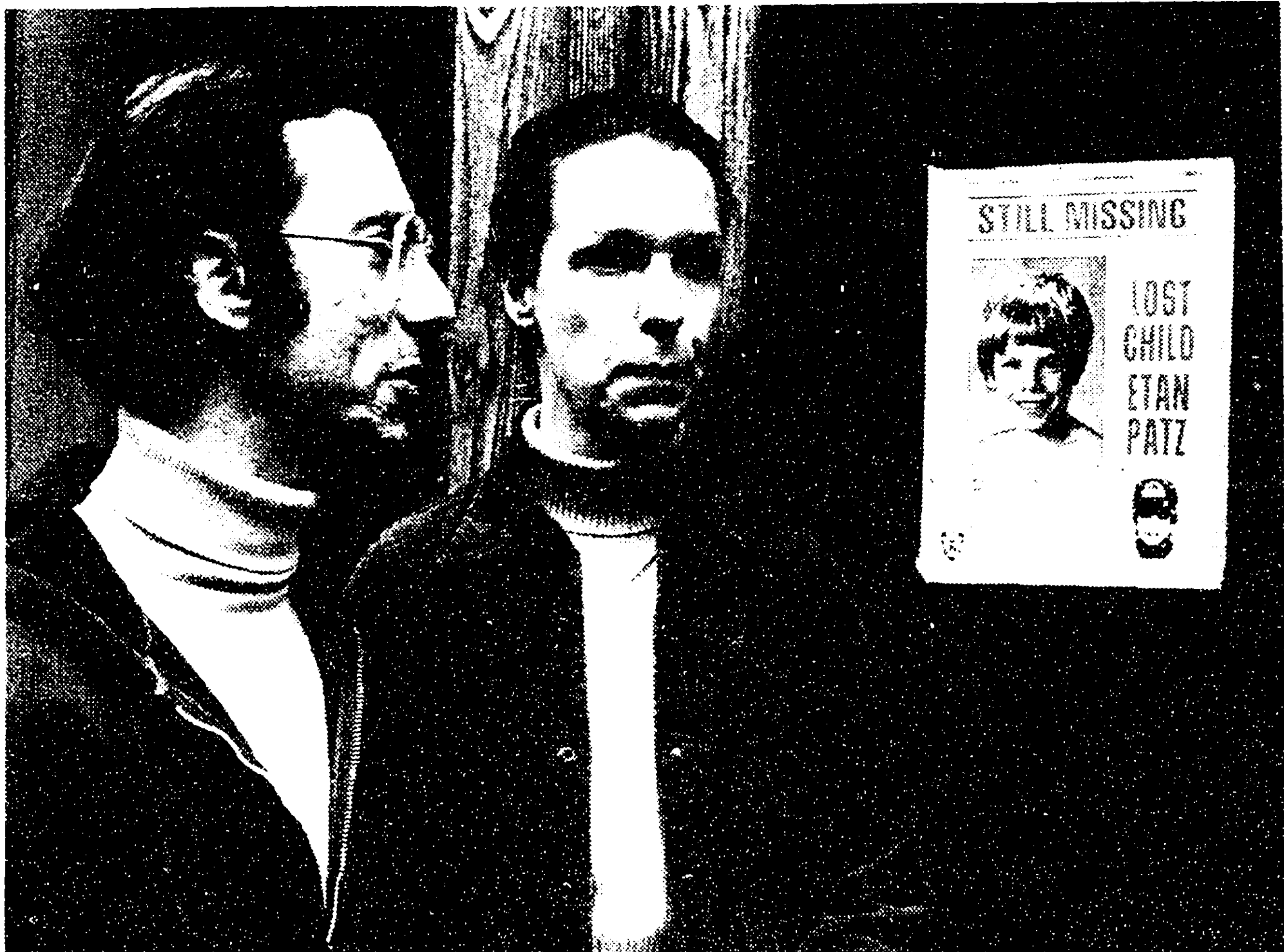
"We've reached the point where it is hard to shut out negative thoughts," she said. "Thank God, Bill and the other detectives have kept our faith alive. But I think the case has even taken a toll on Bill's health."

Detective Thomas J. Finan, who is in charge of the four-detective team in the squad, has collected more than 1,000 reports, and he reviews many of them every day looking for scraps of information that could create a meaningful clue. On the cover of his thick "Missing Person File No. 8367" is a photograph of Etan with a headline, "Still Missing."

"We're following up every lead, every tip, whether it's anonymous or not," said Detective Finan in his 11th-floor office at Police Headquarters.

"This is the toughest of crimes to solve," said Lieut. Earl J. Campazzi, commander of the squad. "There are virtually no clues. Whoever took Etan probably did it in a matter of seconds. But we've got to keep looking for Etan and we have no intention of stopping."





The New York Times / John Sotomayor

Stanley and Julie Patz standing next to a poster of their missing son, Etan, outside their loft in SoHo

# Etan Patz Case: Anguish and Mystery

By ANNA QUINDLEN

On a misty morning a year ago this month, a small boy carrying a book bag with elephants printed on it left for school and disappeared.

It was the same day that John Spenkellink died in a Florida electric chair and that the worst air disaster in United States history took place in Chicago, but in a small way, the disappearance of Etan Patz became big news.

In SoHo, where he lived and vanished, the streets were soon full of posters with his picture and the particulars of his last known whereabouts. His impish face, all bangs and baby teeth, seemed to be everywhere.

But a year is a long time for a little boy to be missing. The leads that once seemed so promising to the police have now grown cold. The 6-year-old boy pictured on the posters is now 7. And the handbills plastered on every boutique and loft building have been covered up with advertisements for avant-garde theater and cabaret acts.

For the people who love him and those who are looking for him, his face is still everywhere, in their minds. But Etan has been gone a year, and no one knows where to find him.

## 'It's Getting Harder'

"It's not getting easier, it's getting harder," said his mother, Julie Patz, her hand over her eyes, her feet up on a couch next to her husband, Stanley.

"The cold realization that we may never get him back sinks in a little farther every day," said Mr. Patz, a photographer who works out of the loft where his family lives. "You can always come to grips with a set of circumstances — I mean the finality of death."

"Any resolution," interrupted his wife. "But we're always talking about abstracts and possibilities."

"This is a psychological wound that will never heal, never close up, without a resolution of one kind or another," Mr. Patz said. "We're over the shock.

The first few weeks we were just numb."

"But we thought that any minute it would be over," his wife continued, and she passed her hand across her face again because her eyes were beginning to fill.

"We're sitting here with as many questions now as we had the first day," Mr. Patz said, his mouth tight.

"More," said his wife.

## On His Way to School

All the questions, it seems, lead nowhere. "Everyone is supposed to love a mystery," Mr. Patz said savagely. "Well, we don't."

The mystery is this: On his way to a school-bus stop at the northwest corner of Prince Street and West Broadway on the morning of Wednesday, May 25, Etan vanished. He had gone as far as

the corner of Prince and Wooster, one block shy of his destination. The police know this because a mailman saw him there.

But he never arrived at the next corner. They know this, too, because a woman whose daughter caught the same bus was waiting to meet Etan, who had left his lunch in a luncheonette on that corner the day before. In the narrow strip of gray city street in between, someone came along and changed forever the lives of a little boy, his family and some police officers.

For Julie and Stanley Patz and their other two children, Shira, 10, and Ari, 3, it has meant many things. It has meant taking telephone calls from people who talk of having visions and speaking to God about Etan and who generally call

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# Etan Patz Vanished a Year Ago, And Case Is Still Baffling Police

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in the early morning hours. The Patzes have kept their telephone number listed because such people might turn out to know something.

It has meant getting mail from similar correspondents addressed only to "Parents of the lost boy, SoHo, New York." It has meant finding strength and hope in the story of Steve Stayner, the California boy who was returned to his family seven years after he was kidnapped, and of keeping their sanity by lobbying for a national clearinghouse for information on lost children.

It has meant having what are normally small decisions take on great weight: Should Ari be allowed to sleep in the top bunk, which was Etan's? Should the bedroom the two boys shared be turned into a room for just one?

It has meant Ari's asking when Etan is coming home, and it has meant Shira's being told by friends at school that they wish it had happened to them so they could go on television and have their pictures in the paper. It has meant constantly entertaining reporters and television camera crews, convinced that publicity may lead to some tip, some clue.

## A Matter of Family Survival

But Mrs. Patz, who no longer works because she devotes nearly all her time to letters and calls about the search, said there had never been any question of whether the event would destroy her family. "That first night after it happened," she said, "after it got dark and it started raining, I thought, 'We have to eat, we have to sleep and we have to keep going.'"

"We had a choice of that or laying down and dying and sometimes the second choice has seemed very tempting. But when Etan comes back, he is going to need his family, and we're going to hold that family together."

For Detective William Butler and the three other detectives from the Missing Persons Bureau assigned exclusively to the disappearance, the case has meant many things as well. "It gets to you," said Detective Butler, a big man with a deep voice who has six children of his own. "You take it home with you at night."

The detectives have questioned the Patzes, people they might have offended, known sex offenders, unknown passers-by, hundreds of people who might have seen or known anything.

## The Frustrating Leads

There are days of phone calls, some like the ones the Patz family has gotten, others from well-meaning people who have found that, basically, all small blond boys look the same and the one they saw in a shopping mall was not the one who disappeared in SoHo.

There was the arrest of a child pornographer in Etan's neighborhood and the hours the detectives spent perusing films and photographs for "our little boy," as they call him. They did not find him there.

There have been some cheering times, like the day last week when a Maryland couple shipped 25,000 new leaflets up to New York because they were concerned. There have been disappointments, too, phone calls "when you went out and said, 'Boom, this is it,'" the detective said, "and then nothing."

And there are the psychics, hundreds of them, who are very sure of themselves. Some say a woman took Etan, some say a man, some say he is alive, some that he is dead. There is bound to be one who will turn out to be right, although Detective Butler doubts it will be the one who said that Etan, at age 6, had intentionally left home to construct a geodesic dome.

"You know kids that age," the detective said. "If he was going to run away, he'd say 'Mommy, will you cross me, I'm going to run away.' No, a woman who lost a child, some person who always wanted a child — that's what I'm hoping for. After a year, it's time — it's time for that person to realize how much pain they've cost this family."

After a year, the disappearance of Etan Patz has come to mean different things to different people in SoHo, too. There are fewer posters now, and they

say "Still Missing" to emphasize how long it has been. Mrs. Patz is not sure whether she will take some of her neighbors up on their offer to hang new ones.

The posters are gone altogether from windows of some of the stores where Etan's face once jockeyed with the displays for attention, although residents of the area wave at Detective Butler and ask how his work is progressing when he takes his daily walk around the area.

"At one point it was almost like civic pride," Mr. Patz said. "When I papered West Broadway, one lady came out of a store and asked for one, as though she wanted to get into step. Now people have done spring cleaning and they've taken them down. I guess some of them don't like the association with something unpleasant."

## 'Someone Knows'

On a block of galleries and small shops, one owner, who did not want her name used for fear of sounding callous, said she did not think that was the reason why the poster campaign had slacked off. "Most of the people I've talked to," she said, "just figure that after all this time, he's dead."

This is something that neither the Patz family nor the detectives assigned to the case will accept.

"I have no evidence that he is not still alive," said Detective Butler, who is preparing to mail fliers on Etan to every elementary school in the country, "so I am operating on the belief that he is alive. Somewhere, out there, is someone who knows something."

Added Mr. Patz, sitting beneath a drawing of a pink-faced monster with red hands with "Etan Patz" in wobbly printing at the top. "We have two alternatives — either he's alive or he's dead. We have chosen the better of the two. He is here, in this house. He's alive here. Every single part of this house . . ." Here he stopped because he could not speak without crying. "He's here — what can I tell you," he finally said.

"He probably has a lot of teeth missing by now," Etan's mother added quietly.